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SUBJECT: MAURITIUS, FRANCE, TROMELIN AND CHAGOS/DIEGO GARCIA

¶1. Tromelin is a low, flat, 200-acre scrub-covered island between Mauritius and Madagascar which is uninhabited (except for a few technicians at a weather station) and has no harbors. It is currently a French territory governed from Reunion -- but is claimed by both Mauritius and France (Mauritius argues that it was occupied illegally by France in 1954). The island itself is of little consequence but it is surrounded by a 110,000 square-mile maritime Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), contiguous to that of Reunion.

¶2. For the last year, Mauritius and France have been discussing the possible economic, environmental and scientific "joint management" of Tromelin, focusing particularly on protection of the marine environment and measures against illegal fishing in the EEZ. The proposed accord will last for five years. The next meeting of the two sides will take place in Mauritius February 4. Mauritius is insisting that any "joint-management" accord will not affect the Mauritian claim of sovereignty over the island. Prime Minister Rangoolam has announced his intention to visit Tromelin later this year.

¶3. COMMENT: The polite Mauritius-France discussions regarding Tromelin are in marked contrast to the frosty diplomatic chill hanging over the Mauritius-UK negotiations concerning Chagos/Diego Garcia (islands similarly claimed by Mauritius).

The UK last year unilaterally proposed a vast Marine Protected Area surrounding the Chagos, which Mauritius has strongly opposed (arguing that any such proposal should be the result of direct bilateral negotiations between Mauritius and the UK). END COMMENT.

WALKLEY